

COMMUNITY HERITAGE COMMISSION

*HIS WORSHIP, THE MAYOR
AND COUNCILLORS*

**SUBJECT: HERITAGE DESIGNATION OF "THE SWINGING GIRL" NEON SIGN
AS A HEIGHTS LANDMARK**

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. THAT a Heritage Designation Bylaw be prepared and advanced to First Reading on 2010 March 01 and to a Public Hearing on 2010 March 16 at 7:00 p.m.
2. THAT Council approve the addition of "The Swinging Girl Neon Sign" to the Burnaby Community Heritage Register – as a 'Protected' heritage landmark.
3. THAT Council approve naming the Swinging Girl neon sign "Helen" in recognition of Mrs. Helen Arnold.
4. THAT Council forward a copy of this report to the Heights Merchants Association for their information.

REPORT

The Community Heritage Commission, at its meeting held on 2010 February 04, received and adopted the *attached* report outlining a proposal for the Heritage Designation of "The Swinging Girl" neon sign as a Heights landmark.

Arising from discussion, the Commission recommended that the Swinging Girl neon sign be named "Helen" in recognition of Mrs. Helen Arnold.

Respectfully submitted,

Councillor C. Jordan
Chair

Councillor A. Kang
Vice Chair

Councillor R. Chang
Member

Copied to:	City Manager Director Finance Director Engineering City Solicitor Director Planning & Building City Clerk
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TO: CHAIR AND MEMBERS
COMMUNITY HERITAGE COMMISSION

DATE: 2010 January 27

FROM: DIRECTOR PLANNING AND BUILDING

FILE: 77000 05

SUBJECT: HERITAGE DESIGNATION OF “THE SWINGING GIRL” NEON SIGN
AS A HEIGHTS LANDMARK

PURPOSE: To outline a proposal for the Heritage Designation of the “The Swinging Girl”
neon sign as a Heights landmark.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Community Heritage Commission approve this Heritage Designation report and request Council approval of the following recommendations:

1. **THAT** a Heritage Designation Bylaw be prepared and advanced to First Reading on 2010 March 01 and to a Public Hearing on 2010 March 16 at 7:00 p.m.
2. **THAT** Council approve the addition of “The Swinging Girl Neon Sign” to the Burnaby Community Heritage Register – as a ‘Protected’ heritage landmark.
3. **THAT** Council forward a copy of this report to the Heights Merchants Association for their information.

REPORT**1.0 BACKGROUND**

In 2007, Council authorized staff to enter into negotiations with Mrs. Helen Arnold, owner of Helen’s Children’s Wear at 4142 East Hastings Street, and Sicon Signs to conclude the acquisition of the landmark “Swinging Girl” neon sign. This initiative reflects a broad city and community interest in providing for the preservation of this widely recognized heritage landmark. Through this project, the sign was legally transferred to the ownership of the City of Burnaby and refurbished to create a sign to mark the Heights shopping district. This report completes the approved proposal for the retention of the sign in the Heights shopping district as a designated heritage site.

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2.0 HERITAGE DESIGNATION

2.1 Local Government Act – Heritage Designation Bylaw Process

Under the terms of the Local Government Act, provision is made for the designation by bylaw of property that has heritage value or character. The intention of a heritage designation bylaw is to ensure that any future design changes to the heritage structure and/or site will require a heritage alteration permit that would be considered by Council and reviewed by the Community Heritage Commission.

Section 968 of the Local Government Act specifies the formal procedures to be followed as part of the designation process which includes a Public Hearing, notification of the owners, and a report outlining the heritage value of the property, the relationship to community or Official Community Plan objectives, the effect of the designation upon the use, the condition and viability of the property and the possibility of the need for financial support.

Specifically the Act requires:

- that a Public Hearing be held.
- that 10 days prior to the Public Hearing, notice must be served on all owners and occupiers of the property.
- that newspaper notices be published in two consecutive issues of a newspaper with the last publication to be at least three days prior but not more than 10 days prior to the Public Hearing.
- that a report be prepared which includes the information in Section 2.2 of this report which is to be available to the public.
- that a completed bylaw be filed in the Land Title Office with the Province and with the owners.

2.2 Heritage Character Statement

Mrs. Helen Arnold first opened Helen's Children's Wear on East Hastings Street in 1948. Her first neon sign was in the store window and featured a stork with a baby bundle. In 1955, after the old Burnaby Municipal offices moved out of 4142 East Hastings Street, Elgin and Helen Arnold purchased this property adjacent to their first location and completed extensive renovations to transform the space into a commercial storefront.

As part of the renovations, Helen Arnold enlisted the assistance of her friend Mr. James Wallace, owner of Vancouver's Wallace Neon Company, to build and install a new sign for her expanded business. Mr. Reeve, one of the neon company's design employees, conceived and created the

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neon sign in 1956, composed of the “Swinging Girl” under a cloud shape with the name “Helen’s”. It is a nine-foot-six high and nine feet wide double-sided sign made of metal with the girl and name both painted and highlighted by neon. The girl is kept swinging by means of a small electric motor hidden in the sign’s hollow core.

The “Swinging Girl” sign immediately became a landmark of Burnaby’s business area on East Hastings Street, now known as the Heights. With the loss of so many examples of neon signs since their heyday in the 1950s, the Helen’s sign became known as one of the best surviving examples of kinetic neon art in British Columbia. It has been included in international neon publications and has been a destination for local neon night tours operated by the Vancouver Museum. The Helen’s sign has survived intact because of the ongoing commitment of Mrs. Helen Arnold to ensure that it remained as the company’s logo and business icon, despite ongoing maintenance and operation costs since it was installed in 1956.

Given its high heritage value, the “Swinging Girl” sign was listed on Burnaby’s heritage inventory in 1988 and is eligible for legal protection through Council’s approval of a Heritage Designation Bylaw and the adoption of a resolution adding the landmark to the Community Heritage Register.

2.3 Compatibility of Conservation with Community Plan and Adjoining Land Use

The planning for the conservation of heritage resources is outlined in Burnaby’s Official Community Plan. Burnaby has established a goal “To provide opportunities for the increased awareness and the conservation of the City’s unique natural, cultural, archaeological and built heritage.” The conservation of this landmark sign is considered compatible within the well-developed and revitalized commercial streetscape of the Heights Shopping District.

Burnaby City Council in partnership with the Board of Directors of the Heights Merchants’ Association, has approved a Heritage Conservation Plan for the sign. The sign has been relocated to a free-standing pole on the City-owned sidewalk (road) right-of-way adjacent to its former location at 4142 East Hastings Street to serve as a heritage landmark to identify the Heights shopping district (see *attachment 1*). This location relates to a “Heritage on the Heights” sign plaque created in 2004 to tell the story of the former Municipal Office located formerly in the Helen’s store and the history of the “Swinging Girl” sign. The sign is proposed to be formally dedicated at a future ceremony conducted in partnership with the Heights Merchants Association.

The conservation of the sign for this purpose conforms to a number of Burnaby’s Official Community Plan goals that include civic acquisition and stewardship of significant heritage resources and the revitalization of the Heights area as an urban village. The conservation and use of the “Swinging Girl” sign as a landmark contributes to the expressed goals and vision for the improvement of the Heights streetscape.

Based on the City’s approved heritage conservation policies, the primary goal for the conservation of the sign is to retain its primary “character defining elements.” An assessment of

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the sign's heritage values have established that it is important that the sign remain in working condition. This includes ensuring that the sign's neon tubing remains lit and that the neon girl continues to swing. It is also considered important that the sign retain its original context as a street-front sign overhanging the sidewalk on Hastings Street to provide visibility and to retain its unique contribution to the overall streetscape.

In order that the sign continue to be relevant as a landmark to mark the Heights shopping district, the old typography of "Helen's" was replaced with similarly designed neon lettering using the word "Heights". This change to the sign's design has not significantly diminished any "character defining elements" or its heritage values as it was accomplished with minimal alteration to the original fabric of the sign. The proposed change was supported by the Heights Merchants Association and by Mrs. Helen Arnold, with the works completed by Sicon Signs.

The 'Swinging Girl' sign under this Conservation Plan will be a heritage landmark that will serve as a new area sign for the unique Heights shopping district.

2.4 Condition and Economic Viability of the Heritage Landmark

The Swinging Girl sign was in excellent physical condition as it has been well maintained. The economic viability of this heritage landmark is considered secure given the sign's good physical condition and recent upgrades made possible through the use of civic gaming funds.

The ongoing care, maintenance and operational costs for this project are proposed to be managed by the City in cooperation with the Heights Merchants' Association. It will be necessary to ensure the good care of the sign through ongoing maintenance. Under the purchase agreement for the sign, the City awarded Sicon Signs a maintenance contract at a fixed-rate for a 36 month term. At the conclusion of the contract, it would be renewed based on established civic purchasing practices. A review by the Purchasing Department has established that the proposal for the restoration and maintenance represents fair market value for the services provided. Staff notes that Sicon Signs is one of the only local sign companies that have extensive experience and knowledge in the repair and maintenance of historic neon signs.

Heights Merchants' Association has committed to partner with the City to assume the annual operational costs of this Business Improvement Area feature through its annual budget. The Merchants' Association would repay the City on an annual basis for the \$1,800.00 per year maintenance costs. The costs associated with the sign's power supply and any extra-ordinary costs associated with the maintenance of the sign would be accommodated within the City's established operating budget for heritage sites.

2.5 Possible Need for Financial Support to Enable Conservation

The Swinging Girl sign is owned by the City of Burnaby and Council has approved that the sign be maintained as part of an annual program contracted with Sicon Signs. Under the proposed designation, the City will ensure the heritage character of this City heritage site will be protected and conserved as part its ongoing program of civic stewardship of its heritage landmarks.

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3.0 CONCLUSION

"The Swinging Girl" neon sign is a much-loved Burnaby community landmark on East Hastings Street. The proposed heritage designation of the sign recognizes this landmark's unique heritage value and history for the Heights neighbourhood and City. The proposed Heritage Designation Bylaw will acknowledge and protect its heritage value as part of the City's standard stewardship practice for City-owned heritage sites. Once the sign is protected by bylaw as a "heritage site", it will have all of the legal protection as authorized under the Local Government Act. Any future proposed changes to the sign's location or design would require Council approval of a Heritage Alteration Permit. Staff will continue to work with the Heights Merchants Association as part of an ongoing partnership to ensure the ongoing conservation and operation of this civic landmark.

It is recommended that the Community Heritage Commission approve this Heritage Designation report and request Council approval of the following recommendations:

THAT a Heritage Designation Bylaw be prepared and advanced to First Reading on 2010 February 15 and to a Public Hearing on 2010 March 16 at 7:00 p.m.

THAT Council approve the addition of "The Swinging Girl Neon Sign" to the Burnaby Community Heritage Register – as a 'Protected' heritage landmark.

THAT Council forward a copy of this report to the Heights Merchants Association for their information.

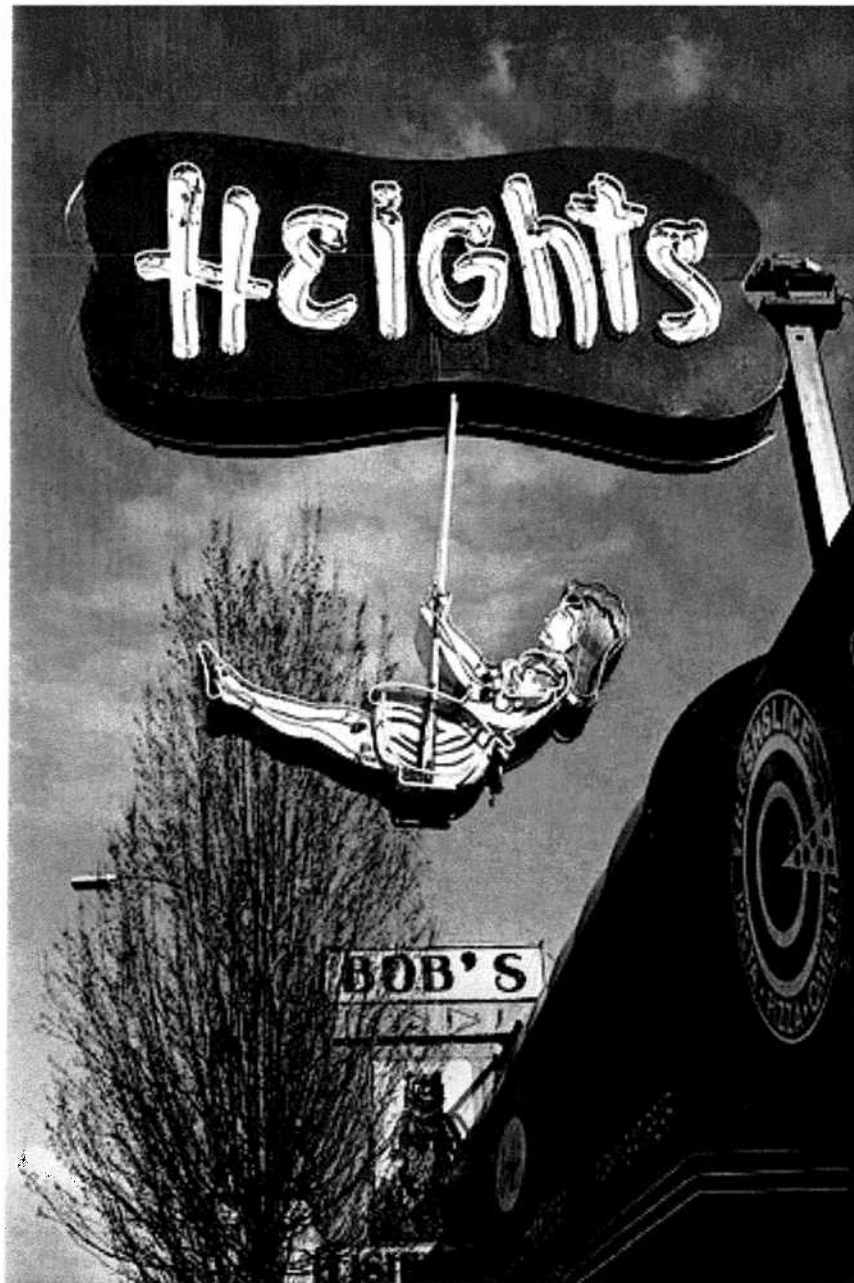

B. Luksun, Director
PLANNING AND BUILDING

JW:tn

cc: City Manager
Director Finance
Director Engineering
City Solicitor

Attachment

P:\Jim Wolf\City Heritage Properties\Heights Sign\CHC Meeting 2010 February 4 - Designation Report.doc



Attachment 1
Restored Swinging Girl sign
4142 East Hastings Street